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SUBJECT: GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISM LAW ENACTED IN MALI

¶1. On November 13, the Malian National Assembly passed legislation regulating the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Mali. Originally submitted to the Assembly in 2006, the GMO legislation had sparked controversy due to the complexity of the issue and the opposition of Mali's well-organized anti-globalization movement. Prior to the bill's passage last week, the Malian government actively reached out to Mali's main anti-globalization advocate, former Minister of Culture Aminata Dramane Traore, to address and alleviate concerns that had previously kept the GMO bill from reaching the Assembly floor for a vote. The measure passed in the Assembly with 108 deputies voting in favor and 20 others voting against.

¶2. Passage of the GMO legislation is a step toward helping Mali's ailing cotton sector match advances achieved in neighboring Burkina Faso, which passed a law enabling the use of GMOs in 2006. Mali's former Minister of Agriculture visited Burkina in 2006 and left impressed that neither pesticides nor herbicides were needed for raising modified Bt cotton. The Minister subsequently pushed for the Malian National Assembly to adopt GMO legislation similar to Burkina's in order to cut costs and increase profits for cotton producers.

¶3. Mali's active anti-globalization movement successfully derailed the GMO issue in Mali for several years. In 2006, however, anti-globalization leader Traore agreed to join a government committee charged with examining the GMO issue. Traore's presence on the committee, and the resulting recommendations, adequately addressed the anti-GMO forces' fears, resulting in easy passage of the bill with the vote falling along party, rather than rural-urban, lines.

¶4. The new law is based almost entirely on the African Union's Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology and the Cartagena Protocols. It is one of the largest pieces of legislation ever enacted in Mali, comprised of 18 pages for the law and another 17 pages of annexes. The law permits use of GMOs in Mali only after strict testing has been completed and the results are reviewed by the Ministry of the Environment. It is unclear whether Mali currently possesses the technical expertise or equipment needed to effectively evaluate GMOs as is now required.

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